

# VE DAY ANNIVERSARY DID WORKERS WIN THE PEACE?

DONNY GLUCKSTEIN UNPICKS THE MYTHS OF NATIONAL UNITY OUR LEADERS LOVE TO CELEBRATE >> PAGES 14&1

- VIRUS CRISIS DRIVING PEOPLE INTO DESTITUTION>> PAGE 20
- PRISONS ARE A DEATH SENTENCE
- OWHY IT'S NOT SAFE TO END THE LOCKDOWN >> PAGES 4&5

# Socialist Worker

£1 | No 2703 | 6 May - 12 May 2020 | socialistworker.co.uk

# DON'T TRUST THE TORIES' UNSAFE BACK TO WORK PLAN



# JOHNSON'S MESSAGE TO WORKERS

'PROFITS BEFORE PEOPLE'

#### LEBANON

# Banks burn in 'revolution against corruption'

PEOPLE demonstrated angrily in Beirut and Tripoli in Lebanon last week.

Soaring inflation has pushed those who are already struggling further into poverty. Protesters in several cities

Protesters in several cities torched at least a dozen banks. One activist said it was a "revolution against corruption".

>>Page 8

#### **BRITAIN**



# Homeless are abandoned by failed system

DESPITE TORY promises to house homeless people, the most vulnerable are left struggling with a situation that's only getting worse. Basic needs are not

being met. Many people are hungry. Hygiene is deteriorating.

deteriorating.
Sadie Robinson spoke to people living on the streets.
>>Pages 10&11

## UNIONS

# Workers' anger forces Royal Mail bosses to retreat

THE THREAT of national strikes and preparations for widespread unofficial walkouts have made management back off from a major assault.

It's a sign action can win, but there are still big battles to come.

>>Page 7



# **'Wonderful** news. Many congratulations to Boris Johnson and Carrie Symonds'

Labour leader Keir Starmer gushes his congrats to Johnson after he becomes a father for the [insert figure]

# 'How comforting it was to finally have some happy news'

The Telegraph feels better after the birth

'We will have to wait to find out if those fair strands of baby hair turn into the blonde thatch for which his father has long been famous

The Telegraph is over-excited

# 'It is not yet clear what colour Wilfred's eyes

The Daily Express finds something else for us to be on the edge of our seats over

# 'A strategy to deal with a 'death of Stalin' type scenario'

Boris Johnson describes his



# Government has lied over free school meals for poor

MANY PARENTS across England have been unable to access vouchers or meals to support children while schools are closed due to the crisis.

The government said children who receive free school meals would be supported with vouchers worth £15 a

The Department for Education admitted it doesn't know how many vouchers have been delivered to parents.

Around 1.3 million children in England are eligible for free school meals. Yet many parents can't download the vouchers.

One school in Worcestershire was forced to turn to a charity to get food parcels for children after it was unable to access vouchers for two weeks.

Head teacher Judith

SCHOOL DINING rooms are empty

a voucher for ten days," she

"They have received the

codes but then the system has not allowed them to redeem their codes.

that have actually managed to get that far have turned not been able to use them

against their shopping."
A primary school in Wembley, north London, has also resorted to food parcels.

Head teacher Raphael Moss said the scheme was "unnecessarily complicated" and had spawned "a catalogue of errors, of chaos really".

One school worker in Cornwall paid for a family's shopping after the mother's voucher code failed at a till.

She had £3 in her purse

and the shopping cost £16.
Parent Heather McNeillis said she had vouchers worth £45 but could not download them as the website kept crashing.

"The money matterswe've been able to eat fresh fruit and vegetables because of it," she said.

restrictions. Data from the National Police Chiefs' Council showed that around 400 have been fined more than once. One person was

**Covid cops in** 

**COPS HAVE issued over** 

9,000 fines in England and Wales for breaches of coronavirus lockdown

fine form

fined times. Cops doled out some 8,877

fixed penalty notices in England between 27 March and 27 April, and 299 in

They can fine people £60 for alleged breaches, reduced to £30 if paid within two weeks.

For each "repeat offence" the fine doubles to a maximum of £960.

# Screwed for £500 a month

**PRISON** officers are getting coronavirus bonus payments of up to £580 a month, leaked documents have revealed.

The payouts, on top of overtime, are to cover for sick or self-isolating colleagues.

Prison "operational managers" who work overtime are grabbing an extra £1,500 a month.

They are grabbing the cash under the Toryapproved "Covid-19 Special payment Scheme".

If prison officers say they'll work nine hours a week paid overtime for four weeks they will get a bonus of £500. If they commit to 12 weeks this rises to £1.750.

Meanwhile health secretary Matt Hancock has said it is "not the time" to consider giving NHS workers a pay rise.

# Sad bosses sack hundreds

THE OASIS and Warehouse fashion chains have said they will permanently close all stores and online shopping.

The closures will slash over 1,800 jobs and see 92 stores shut. Administrators Deloitte

said it announced the redundancies with "great sadness".

But they added that the workers, who had been on furlough, would not receive any payment until funds are received from the government.



Tinsley said the system is a "nightmare". "We've got families who've not received

"And then some families

THERESA MAY has made over £1 million out of speaking engagements since she quit as Tory prime minister last June. Given that when in office, May simply repeated rehearsed mantras and avoided answering any questions, it's bizarre how she does it. Speeches by May in March alone netted her £230,000.

# **Key worker Farage's** crypto fat cat backer

BORIS JOHNSON'S father, Stanley, hopes to cash in. He is angling for his 40 year old novel, The Marburg Virus, to be reissued. His agent promises that Stanley Johnson is a "tireless self-promoter". Jonathan Lloyd of Curtis Brown described the book as an "unnervingly prophetic, intelligent thriller". In it, an epidemiologist finds time to have sex with women in four poster beds while

sex with women in four poster beds while

racing to track down the source of the virus.

**Cryptocurrency investor Christopher Harborne** donated £6.5 million to Nigel Farage's Brexit Party in the last quarter of 2019.

He gave £9.7 million to the party over eight months—over half the party's income.

Harborne invests in a web of offshore firms and sometimes uses the pseudonym Chakrit Sakunkrit.

**Electoral Commission** figures also show that the Brexit Party has received £11.6 million in donations above £500 since it was formed.

Farage and chairperson Richard Tice own around 87 percent of the Brexit Party's shares.

NIGEL Farage travelled over 100 miles to film a video where he rants about migrants.

Farage travelled from his home in Kent to Pett Level, a south coast beach. He later travelled further to Hastings. A spokesperson suggested Farage had key worker status. In an email to supporters, Farage complained that "illegal immigrants continue to arrive on our shores. Many of these migrants are coming from camps in which we know there is an outbreak of Covid-19," he warned.

THE White House Gift OFLOVS VISION Shop has a great way for you to remember the corona virus crisison the off chance you'd

**Trump coins it in** 

to remember crisis

just forget it. It has produced 1,000 edge-numbered coins celebrating Donald Trump's response to coronavirus.

It includes a White **House Seal Presentation** Case. You get a choice of message for your coin.

You can have one reading about CITIZENS Did "Covid-19 Task Force-

**PRESIDENT** DONALD J TRUMP-VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL R PENCE". You can get one for just \$125 or \$100

if it's an offer day If you're still alive.

Farage

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rather not



Socialist Worker PO Box 74955

World vs

Together

We FOUGHT

UNSEEN

Enemy".
Or how

Virus-

The



# Workers call day of action and raise safety demands

by TOMÁŠ TENGELY-EVANS

TRADE UNIONISTS and campaigners planned to hold a day of action on Thursday to demand "no return to unsafe workplaces".

It came as the Tory government will decide whether to extend or lift the lockdown (see pages 4&5).

The day of action was called by the People Before Profit: Health Worker Covid Activists group. It was backed by the Shut the Sites group and a number of coronavirus action committees, made up of local trade unions, campaigns and activists.

A statement from the group called for "no return to work until it is safe" and "that those not at work have their livelihoods fully protected".

It said moves to reopen more businesses are "being driven by the needs of profit not safety".

"A return to work in non-essential production and services can only take place safely once the virus is fully under control and with a vast expansion of testing and community tracing facilities."

Activists are demanding proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health, care and other workers.

Almost half of doctors might be buying their own PPE or relying on donations, according to the British Medical Association.

#### **Protected**

Its survey, published last weekend, found that 65 percent of doctors who responded said they were only partly or not at all protected.

Groups were considering a range of socially-distanced actions, including cavalcades to hospitals and protests against possible moves to reopen primary schools.

reopen primary schools.

The plans follow a day of action on International Workers' Memorial Day on Tuesday of last week. The TUC union federation had called for a





WEEKLY CLAPS have shown the widespread support that exists for NHS and social care workers. Now activists are organising a day of action to demand that workers are kept safe

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

minute's silence to remember workers who have died of coronavirus.

In some workplaces activists held protests against the Tories and bosses after the minute's silence.

In Haringey, north London, trade unionists and other activists joined a cavalcade to the local hospital on the day. They followed up with a 30-strong cavalcade on May Day, International Workers' Day, on

Friday of last week. Draped in banners and signs, people drove around the area and chanted slogans through a megaphone.

The cavalcade finished up at North Middlesex University Hospital, where it was greeted by union reps from inside.

In a socially distanced rally, Oktay Sahbaz from the Turkish and Kurdish organisation Day-Mer delivered a message of solidarity to health workers and slammed Tory austerity. "We are underlining our support for health workers," he said.

"We know you are working with insufficient PPE, day and night, to prevent the spread of the deadly coronavirus."

There is a battle coming over a return to work—activists have to build action now.

# Section 60 orders rise as coppers clamp down

ARE THE cops preparing the ground for repression? They already have extra powers under new laws, such as to fine those deemed to be breaching the rules.

These rules state, for example, that "no person may leave the place where they are living without reasonable excuse".

But there has now been a spike in the imposition of Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act in urban areas.

This allows senior cops to sanction searches without any grounds for suspicion if they believe there's a chance serious violence "will" occur. Bradford and Liverpool

Bradford and Liverpool have had repeated orders in place in the last few weeks. And several London



boroughs including Islington, Camden and Hackney have all had section 60 orders in place in the last week.

While the orders are announced usually following a crime they are, even on a positive interpretation, intended to be preventative measures.

They invariably lead to repression. Black and Asian people were nine times more likely to be stopped and searched in England and Wales than white people in 2017-18.

But this rises to 40 times more likely when police use stop and search powers under Section 60.

Some of the overreach by cops to hit the media has seemed trivial. For instance last week they stopped a string quartet playing Shostakovich in a Kensington garden. But away from the leafy suburbs, the increase in stop and search will have a more severe—and racist—impact.

Simon Basketter

# Socialist Worker Political

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Send 'start' to the number

# Poor far more likely to die

POORER AREAS have been hit hardest by the coronavirus crisis, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Areas of inner city London and Birmingham and Manchester have higher death rates.

Newham in east
London was the worst in
Britain with 144 deaths
per 100,000 people—
compared to the national
average of 36. It is the
poorest borough in
London, with 48 percent
of people living in
poverty.

Prost in west London

Brent in west London had 141.5 deaths per 100,000 people and nearby Hackney had 127.4.
Labour mayor of Hackney
Philip Glanville said the figures
were down to "the links between
inequality, poverty, ethnicity and
health".
The poorest 10 percent of
postcodes across Englan

postcodes across England and Wales have a death rate of 55 per 100,000 people. That's compared to a death rate of 25 per 100,000 people in the

richest 10 percent.

Professor Sir Michael
Marmot said that
coronavirus was not the
"great leveller"—but had
showed up "underlying
health inequalities".



# Don't open schools too early, warn teachers

Tory plans to get parents back to work are unsafe—and totally dishonest, reports Sadie Robinson

THE GOVERNMENT is set to lay out ideas next weekend for an "exit strategy" to the coronavirus

Boris Johnson reportedly wants a mass return to work from 26 May and for schools to start to reopen from 1 June. Many workers rightly fear that they will be pushed back to work in unsafe conditions.

Fran Manning, a primary school teacher and NEU union rep in south London, said most school workers think it's too soon to reopen schools. "In China they waited until they had zero new cases before lifting the lockdown," she told Socialist

"Here, we don't even know how many new cases we have because we're not testing people."

Chris Denson, district secretary of Coventry NEU, agreed. "It's not the time to think about reopening schools," he told Socialist Worker. "The NEU has five tests it says should be met before schools reopen. None have been met—there's no contact tracing for instance.

"Lots of pupils who have the virus aren't symptomatic. A lot of people are terrified about the idea of schools reopening.

The NEU's five tests are not the same as the Tories'. They include

## **BACK STORY**

The Tories want schools open so arents can be pushed back to

•They claim re-opening schools is to help vulnerable children and struggling parents

Yet they have spent years slashing school funding and driving up poverty

If they really cared about child poverty, they could give parents extra money, provide free internet, laptops and textbooks

cases and a national plan for social distancing and regular testing.

ive with vulnerable people.

Reopening schools doesn't just risk. It also affects their families. not to mention all the parents the those who are better off. government will then push to get

dren living in multi-generational households and with relatives who have health issues. It's not going to the wellbeing of students," she told

and suspend bills and rents

The union also says the protect vulnerable staff or those who in maintaining social distancing.

Fran said, "We have chilmuch lower numbers of Covid-19 help working class children to get

back to school and be part of spread-

IT'S SAFEST to keep schools shut

She pointed out that the size of government must outline plans to classrooms would add to problems

Many ordinary people are suffering under the lockdown (see put school workers and children at right ). And being stuck at home hits poorer children harder than

> Emma Davis, a primary school teacher and NEÚ rep in Barking and Dagenham in London, said there is "debate" about schools reopening. "People are deeply concerned about about children?

SCHOOL workers are

respond to Tory attempts

discussing how to

to reopen schools.

And school unions are

growing. Emma said, "We have

been organising online

for the first time at my

renewed interest in the

union. People want to

and take part in the

discussions

"There's been a

school.

"And some will think that other working class parents and children." workers are putting their necks on the line, so what's so special about us? But the mood as a whole in my union group is that it's far too soon to talk about ending the lockdown.

"We should have fewer workers putting their lives at risk, not more." We shouldn't fall for the idea that the Tories are motivated by a desire to help ordinary people.

As Fran said, "How dare the Tories say they want to reopen schools because they are concerned the first place.

Emma said it's good

to point out that workers

can refuse to work under

Section 44 of the 1996

**Employment Rights Act-**

without a strike ballot.

But she added, "I also

think the union should be

talking about industrial

"If the government

says schools reopen on

enough just to leave it to

1 June I don't think it's

school groups to invoke

Get organised to resist re-open attempts

And Chris said. "In

Coventry we've got quite a few new members and

loads of new union reps.

Lots of people are coming

"We are trying to have

groups should be meeting

schools have to look like

Zoom meetings in every

school to discuss the

and discussing what

issues.

forward wanting to be

health and safety reps

has "highlighted problems in the

"Ouarantine is fine if you have a big house and a garden," she said. "If you're in a one-bedroom flat with no outside space it isn't.

"The Tories claim to feel sorry for children in overcrowded homes or who don't have laptops or broadband. But they're the reason those children are disadvantaged in

"The fact that they want to reoper "These are the same people primary schools shows this is about

Fran added that

protecting safety into

"We've got to get

prepared to take action

"We might have to

refuse to go in if it isn't

safeguarding students

and staff is organisation

ourselves," she said.

their own hands.

organised and be

safe.'

workers may have to take

# Why it's right to stick with lockdown measures

THE TORIES want to figure out a way to end the lockdown so that bosses can get back to making money.

But ordinary people understandably fear that being forced back to work could put their lives at risk.

A YouGov poll of 3,152 adults last week showed that 77 percent backed the lockdown continuing And 46 percent would "strongly support extending the lockdown.

So now the Tories are trying to find ways to reassure people that it's safe to go back to work.

Boris Johnson told us that Britain is past the peak of the virus, on the same day that more than 700 more deaths were announced.

The government are considering new measures so they can claim people will be kept safe. Some ministers are for scrapping safety measures, such as the twometre distancing guideline.

Scrapping the guideline would make it much easier to reopen schools and other workplaces.

The Daily Mail newspape attacked ordinary people for being scared about returning to work while apparently having fun in parks.

**Temperature** 

checks leave

workers cold

The plan is just one measure

distancing guidelines and time slots

for commuters to book onto trains.

He told Socialist Worker, "Any plan

to have people working as normal

passengers to be safe on packed

public transport and impossible for

Underground that we couldn't run a

full service if we wanted to—which

we don't. Any attempt at making

people work in unsafe conditions

must of course be fought by the

"However as always, if any

they are being asked to put

completely supported.

come above profit.

themselves in a situation they

believe is not safe then they need

"Any worker who does refuse to

"There is no way that transport

their families at risk, so the city and

the bosses can start making profits.

workers should put themselves or

"We should resist this. Our

health and our lives should always

to know they can refuse to do it.

work under this situation will be

individual worker has any concerns

"It will be impossible for

"At the minute there are

that many staff off sick on the

staff to be safe in work.

Phil Rowan is an RMT union rep

Tories are considering to get

Others include new social

TEMPERATURE CHECKS for commuters could be brought in to get public transport systems fully

back up and running

people back to work.

will be a disaster.

transport unions.

It wants to brand people who don't want to work as "lazy". In reality, people are understandably in fear of losing their lives or losing loved ones. That's why it isn't only work

that people are avoiding. An Ipsos Mori poll last week found that 61 percent of people would be nervous about going to bars or restaurants even if

What is Labour's response to the push to get people back to

restrictions are lifted.

London mayor Sadig Khan is drawing up plans to encourage more walking and cycling, to avoid crammed Tube trains.

And Labour leader Keir Starmer has complained that the Tories have been "slow at every turn" in ending the lockdown.

It's a disgrace that Labour is putting bosses' profits above the health of the most vulnerable.

# **Socialist Worker** WHAT WE THINK

# W E HAVE TO FIGHT TO **STOP RETURN TO WORK**

past month telling us, "Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives." They may as well adopt a new mantra now—"Get back to work, protect the economy, save the bosses."

Boris Johnson is set to unveil a "road map" to ending the lockdown on Sunday. Tories and the bosses are desperate to get profits flowing again. They could scrap safety rules that, up until now, we were told are crucial to stopping the spread of coronavirus.

In parliament on Monday Tory Sir Graham Brady demanded an end to "arbitrary limitations on freedom as quickly as possible". He whined that people had been "a little too willing to stay at home".

Prior to this, right wing papers attacked ordinary people for "flouting" the lockdown by going to parks. Now the same papers publish the same photos to denounce us for being in parks but not being in work.

First we were responsible for spreading coronavirus. Now we are to blame for trashing the economy. Whatever the message, ordinary people get the blame. Polls show that a majority of people support continuing

HETORIES have spent the | the lockdown. Many fear being pushed back to work in unsafe conditions—and rightly so.

People still at work, such as health workers and bus drivers. are dying because they don't have enough safety equipment. And under the Tories' draft guidance, bosses get to decide what's needed to keep us safe.

So they could "consider limiting how many workers are in a vehicle. And they could help people with health conditions work from home "where possible One radical suggestion is

for workers to avoid sharing pens. And the two-metre social distancing recommendation could be scrapped. The guidance is so

Whatever the message, it's ordinary people who always get the blame

poor that it has pushed Labour and union leaders, including TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady, to speak out.

O'Grady wrote in the Guardian newspaper that it amounted to little more than the governmen "crossing its fingers that employers will act responsibly"

Even Labour leader Keir Starmer raised a few criticisms. But we can't trust Labour or the union leaders to fight for our safety. Starmer has spent weeks

echoing the bosses in demanding an "exit strategy" to the lockdown. And unions have been in talks with the Tories about how to calm people's safety fears enough to get them back to work.

The slightly harder rhetoric from some may be a temporary shift to strengthen their position in these talks.

Tens of thousands more people will die if the Tory plans go ahead. And disgracefully, lack of money will make many feel they have no choice but to return to work.

Our lives are more than a bargaining chip in talks with

government officials.
It will take resistance from working class people to keep us

# **NO NATIONAL UNITY**

EOPLE AT the top like to claim we're "all in it together"—that we must make sacrifices to get through the coronavirus crisis. But the only people making sacrifices are those at the bottom.

We can see that most starkly in the US where Donald Trump and state governors are pushing to lift the lockdowns and reopen the

They know that tens of thousands will die because of it. According to the Trump

administration's own internal documents revealed by the New York Times , the daily death toll will reach 3,000 by Í June.

That's a 70 percent increase from 1,750—already the highest death toll in the world.

And the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, often quoted by Trump's administration, has doubled its estimate of likely

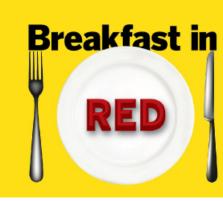
It says "rising mobility in most US states as well as the easing

of social distancing measures will promote transmission of the coronavirus". It's foreseen but

The problem isn't just Trump. In Britain, where the death toll has continued to increase, the Tories and big business are itching to get back to business as usual.

They don't mind if that means many more deaths as long as the cash starts flowing again.
That's the reality behind

national unity—we make sacrifices so they can make profits.



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Teachers should prepare to take action



# **ANALYSIS ALEX CALLINICOS**

# **Imperialist rivalries** heighten the crisis

THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic represents a crisis that is simultaneously biological, economic, and political. The struggle to contain a deadly virus has caused a gigantic economic collapse. Currently, 30 million unemployment claims have been made in the US since early March. This is further destabilising the global political order.

This is common in a global crisis. The first Great Depression—1873-96—accelerated the development of rival imperialisms whose rivalries sparked the First World war. The second Great Depression—1929-39—intensified economic competition among the Great Powers, creating the conditions for the Second World War.

It looks pretty clear now that the financial crash of 2007-8 ushered in the third Great Depression of industrial capitalism. The economist Nouriel Roubini—one of the few to have predicted the global financial crisis of 2007-9—is warning that the 2020s will be dominated by a "Greater Depression".

One of the ten factors responsible for this trend is what Roubini calls "the geostrategic standoff between the US and China". And on cue, we have Donald Trump sounding off about China's "horrible mistake" and claiming that the Covid-19 virus was manufactured in a laboratory in Wuhan.

Trump has been contradicted by his director of national intelligence, Richard Grenfell, who says, "The intelligence community also concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the Covid-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified." This hasn't stopped Trump or his secretary of state Mike Pompeo, who goes on about the "Wuhan virus" as if biological organisms arrive with national passports in their

Trump and Pompeo are echoed by the Tory right in Britain. Charles Moore, Telegraph columnist and Margaret Thatcher's official biographer, denounces "a system of governmental, scientific and intellectual control whose secretiveness and mendacity have created the most sudden and widespread health crisis in history".

#### Vacuum

Now Trump is playing electoral politics. He was counting on a soaring stock market and low unemployment to get himself re-elected in November. Instead, he faces an economic collapse unprecedented in its speed and severity. He's trying to fill the vacuum with more racism and China-bashing. And hapless Democratic candidate Joe Biden is playing the same game about China.

But the situation is much more serious than these party games. Trump's policy of slapping tariffs on imports from China was unpopular with the big US corporations using supply chains that start in China. But his aim of blocking president Xi Jinping's campaign of technologically upgrading Chinese industries has much wider support—and not just in the US. The normally cowardly European Union now describes China as a "strategic competitor" in some areas.

Moreover, China faces the same multidimensional crisis. Even according to the dodgy official figures, the economy shrank by a massive 6.8 percent in the first quarter of 2020.

The initial mishandling of the pandemic threatened the legitimacy of the regime, which then seized control of the situation in a highly authoritarian, but apparently effective way. Xi can't be seen to take Trump's attacks lying down. Moreover, the cliché that we won't be returning to the

old pre-Covid "normal" is certainly true economically. Companies are waking up to how vulnerable dependence on just-in-time methods of production and China-centred supply chains makes them. Even before the pandemic, the Trump administration was pushing US firms to bring their supply chains back to the US.

The present crisis will reinforce this tendency. Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe has called on his country's companies to reduce their dependence on Chinese sites and set aside £2.6 billion to help them.

Although talk about "deglobalisation" is widespread, transnational production networks will survive because they are profitable. Trump's trade war was already encouraging companies to shift assembly-line production from China to Vietnam, where labour costs are lower. And China's manufacturing capacities are already too advanced to dispense with. But the global economy is fragmenting, and this will lead to more conflicts between competing imperialist powers.



ACTIVISTS FROM Extinction Rebellion demand the scrapping of high speed rail

# Anti-HS2 campaigners want money spent on NHS instead

by **SARAH BATES** 

**CLIMATE** catastrophe activists blocked HS2 construction on Monday morning as part of their rebellion against the hugely damaging high speed railway.

Activists from "HS2 Rebellion"—a group affiliated to Extinction Rebellion blocked entrances to construction sites in London and Warwickshire.

Small groups of activists held banners declaring "NHS not HS2" to draw attention to the huge cost in building and maintaining the new rail line, at a time when cash is needed for the health service.

"HS2 Rebellion is calling for all work on HS2 to be halted, the project scrapped and the roughly £200 billion it is costing to be invested in the NHS instead," said the group. They also highlighted that healthcare workers can't even gain access to vital PPE

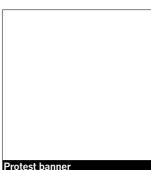
that they need.
"HS2 Ltd is using the Covid19 lockdown to push ahead with its most controversial and destructive work, endangering workers and the general public, whilst causing irreparable damage to nature.

The direct action group claim that HS2 Ltd-which is overseeing the construc-tion—is not undertaking basic social distancing and hygiene measures to keep their workers safe.

Footage from the blockade near Kenilworth, in Warwickshire, saw one rebel heavily bleeding from the head and crouched on the

HS2 Rebellion said the activist was "punched repeatedly by a security guard" and dragged across the ground by HS2 workers.

Activist James Brown, who was arrested for allegedly



# Trump's fossil fuel friends grab a bailout

FOSSIL FUELS firms that make their cash from polluting the planet have grabbed millions more in aid during the

coronavirus crisis.

A review by research group Documented and the Guardian newspaper found that \$28 million went to three coal mining firms. All had ties to US

president Donald Trump. Hallador Coal, which hired Trump's former environment chief Scott Pruitt as a lobbyist, grabbed \$10 million.

**Coal mining firm Rhino** Resources, formerly run by Trump official David cashing in \$10 million.

**Coal firm Ramaco** Resources is getting 8.4 million

Its boss Randy Atkins is on the energy department's National Coal Council.

The US Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act has so far paid out \$2.1 trillion.

The amount of cash going to polluting industries is likely to go up. And Documented researcher Jesse Coleman pointed out that the information is based on "voluntary disclosures by the companies". "No matter what,

it's going to be an incomplete picture of what's going on," he said. climbing onto a drilling rig to stop it working, said, "I know the power wielded by HS2 is enormous because of the apparent bottomless money pit that underpins the project, but I also know of the determination of the very many who are opposed to it.

"I cannot sit back and watch this without taking action. I'm going to do all I can to prevent this project from going ahead.

Construction in the Colne Valley risks polluting an aquifer that supplies a fifth of London's drinking water. The rebels in the area put up banners saying, "Protect London's drinking water" as they occupied drills.

Rebels from around the country have travelled to set up protection camps along the route to stop the destruction of natural habitats.

Haylie Marie, an NHS worker who lives at the Harvil Road camp, said, "Our NHS is underfunded and can't supply basics for workers, yet HS2 continues.

"It has to stop."

The action comes a little over a year since the government declared a climate and ecological emergency.

Yet despite warm words from the Tories, they continue to pour money into catastrophic projects like HS2. HS2 construction should be

stopped and the entire project should be scrapped in an effort to prevent climate chaos

# Threats of action halt attacks by Royal Mail

Bosses retreated after workers threatened walkouts over cuts and shift changes, reports Nick Clark

ROYAL MAIL bosses backed off from a major attack on jobs and working conditions last week. The workers' CWU union

announced on Friday that Royal Mail's chief executive had made significant concessions over a move to scrap letters deliveries on Saturdays.

The change would have had a big impact on workers' shifts and time off, and been a step towards changes that could cost 20,000 jobs.

But after the threat of national strikes and widespread unofficial walkouts, bosses backed off.

One CWU rep told Socialist Worker that workers "feel like they've won—and the managers have their heads in their hands".

Bosses announced on Tuesday last week that they planned to temporarily suspend letters deliveries on Saturdays, with changes to shift patterns starting from next Monday.

This would mean forcing through later working hours on weekdays, and disruptive changes to workers' scheduled days off.

The plans were also announced without talking to workers or the CWU—and provoked a huge backlash, with the union threatening to call national strikes.

The union also told its members not to cooperate with changes to shifts and working patterns.

There were already reports of unofficial walkouts over changes in workplaces such as a delivery office in Newbury.

#### **Widespread**

Facing widespread strikes, chief executive Rico Back told CWU leaders that changes to working hours would now only be voluntary and to be agreed by union reps.

He also said the suspension of letters deliveries would only last six weeks, and be reviewed every fortnight.

Mark Dolan, a CWU rep in north London, told Socialist Worker, "It's a massive climbdown by Royal Mail, and a battle won. The difference

# **BACK STORY**

running battle over the future of

- wants to break up Royal Mail
- •He wants to split it into a parcels company for profit, and a letters company to be run down
- to deliver letters six days a week
- His proposed changes could workers who remain

between what Royal Mail said at the start of the week and now is huge."
He said, "Time off arrangements

are really precious to people.
"They've been coming to work during the coronavirus outbreak, often in places where there's no proper social distancing or protective equipment.'

Mark said, "Places like Newbury are a gauge for how the members were feeling.

#### Suspended

"Come 11 May we would have been on unofficial industrial action. People would have been suspended and it would have been unofficial

up and down the country."
But he added, "The war is far from won.'

Rico Back still wants to push ahead with plans to break up Royal Mail into a profitable parcels company and a reduced letters service.

After this week's climbdown, he's offered new talks to the CWU over the long-running dispute.

The result shows it's the threat of action-not just talks-that can

"That's the power that workers have got at the coalface," said Mark.





Royal Mail workers are in a long their jobs

- Chief executive Rico Back
- This involves ditching the duty
- cost 20,000 jobs—and mean much worse conditions for those

A MILLIONAIRE fast food boss sacked all his workers at a store in Great Yarmouth just as the

lockdown began-ignoring their

**FAST FOOD** 

pleas to keep them on furlough. Workers at a Taco Bell in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, were made redundant at the end of March. They were told bosses at franchise holder The Adil Group couldn't afford to keep them on despite multimillion pound turnovers.

Now, without pay or immediate entitlement to benefits, many of them are struggling to get by in the

#### Redundant

Izzy, one of the 14 workers made redundant, told Socialist Worker, "When we closed the shop on 23 March we believed we would be furloughed.

"I got a text from a senior manager telling us not to look for other work or we wouldn't be entitled to payments under furlough.

"A week later we got an email saying we'd been made redundant

Izzy added that her £600

redundancy payment meant she wasn't entitled to Universal Credit during the whole of April.

Millionaire boss throws desperate

Taco Bell workers on the scrapheap

"Because it's seasonal work where we are, it's impossible to get a job anyway," she said.

"Now with the coronavirus it's even harder.

"There are people with children who've been made redundant.

"One person might have to drop out of college, and the general manager could end up homeless."

#### Sudden

Izzy said the sudden sacking was all the more angering as she and others had helped to open new branches in other parts of the

"I went to open Taco Bell in Northampton, worked 16 or 17 hour days and came back with bronchitis. I've had cold sores, and burned lips from standing too close to the grill.

"Now we're getting no support." Adil Group owner Raja Adil was exposed in Socialist Worker in 2016 for employing workers in KFC outlets on zero hours contracts—against claims by KFC

Now he has thrown another group of workers on the scrapheap. The email sent to Izzy said the decision to sack the workers was made "with great sadness and a heavy heart'

It also said, "Our number one priority at this difficult time is the safety and well-being of our employees.'

Yet Izzy's pleas for workers to be kept on furlough during the outbreak—where the government subsidises 80 percent of workers' wages—have been met with silence.

**Praising**Shockingly, Adil has posted on the LinkedIn social network site praising the furlough scheme. Izzy said, "Raja Adil has the

ability to support us.

"I've sent emails to Taco Bell and Adil Group manager Grant Roderickson, but I've just been ignored.

"I want to get the message out to people—don't go out of your way to help a CEO who won't help



**UNOFFICIAL STRIKES** would have hit the service hard

## **IN BRIEF**

# **French teachers** could walk out

TEACHERS IN France could strike next Monday in opposition to plans to begin reopening schools.

The Fnec FP-FO education union said, "In the absence of safety guarantees, we will support all personnel who refuse to return to their workplace by

A petition circulated by the union has reached 60,000 signatures. It says the announcement by president Emmanuel Macron to "reopen creches, schools and educational establishments from 11 May is irresponsible, dangerous and

It's not just what happens in schools, but the danger of travelling to them.

Even Catherine Guillouard, the top boss of the RATP public transport network around Paris, said, "Social distancing is not feasible in such a dense network."

The schools are at the centre of a major fight over whether Macron can achieve his wish to restart profit-making.

Meanwhile, there were several arrests of activists who held socially-distanced May Day protests against Macron.

And in Montreuil around 20 people from a Solidarity Brigade group were questioned and then fined by police after they held a free distribution of fruit and vegetables

But cops allowed Nazi Marine Le Pen, surrounded by media, to carry out a wreath-laying at the statue of Joan of Arc.

President Jair Bolsonaro

# **Anger against Brazil's far right**

BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT Jair Bolsonaro has been met with renewed anger over his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

On Sunday he appeared for the second week running to support anti-lockdown protesters outside his palace in the capital Brasilia.

They demanded that sanctions and restrictions are lifted, and some called for military rule.

But protesters opposed to Bolsonaro also mobilised.

They bang pots and pans and "Get out, Bolsonaro!" in weekly protests from their

# Mass protest returns to the streets of Lebanon

by NICK CLARK

PROTESTS HAVE exploded back onto the streets of Lebanon, as people battled cops and soldiers and set fire to banks over poverty and hardship.

Hundreds of people demon-strated in Beirut and Tripoli last week, as soaring inflation pushes people already struggling further into poverty.

Demonstrators in many cities torched at least a dozen banks during protests on Tuesday of last

The largest and most violent demonstrations took place in Tripoli, Lebanon's poorest city, after soldiers killed a protester.

Fouaz al-Semaan died on Tuesday of last week after being injured on protests the night before. The 26 year old's sister Fatima said the army had shot him.

Protesters began setting fire to banks after a funeral procession for Fouaz last Tuesday, fighting cops and soldiers late into the night.

Nearly 50 percent of Lebanon's population live in poverty-and many are angry at a government that has tried to make them pay for its economic crisis.

Lebanon's government failed to make an international debt repayment in March.

As the value of the Lebanon pound plummeted, the government imposed restrictions preventing people from withdrawing their

money in dollars.
One protester, Abdelaziz Sarkousi, said, "What you're seeing is a result of accumulated problems.

"We had a revolution, people were suffering, then came corona and people were locked in their homes for a month and a half without the state securing food and drink or anything else for them

'Now we have reached a state where unfortunately you cannot control people anymore. People

Yehya, a protester in Tripoli, said, "People went to the streets because they have no jobs. Children are asking their parents to buy food and they do not have money to buy

A mass movement against the government began in October last

Thousands of people took to the streets after the government tried to impose a tax on WhatsApp messages. The tax sparked anger in a country with high youth unemployment and where austerity has

The government was forced to

But the protests spiralled into a movement against corruption that demanded fundamental political

olution against a corrupt elite who have enriched themselves while ordinary people suffer.

The movement forced the resignation of former prime minister Saad Hariri. But his replacement

Now the movement is back on the streets with angrier, more con-

Al-Jazeera news network, "We are

ruption. All officials say there is corruption, but what have they done?

prison. Instead they are shooting

are hungry.

# them any.

# ravaged basic public services.

Many protesters called for a rev-

Riad Salame didn't represent the fundamental change the movement

frontational protests than before. Activist Bilal Jundi told the

"The revolution is against cor-

"We don't see any thieves in at the people."

# Workers take to streets to protect lives and jobs

WORKERS IN Greece have taken to the streets under lockdown conditions, pledging to resist attempts to make them pay for the coronavirus crisis.

Hundreds of people took part in May Day demonstrations on Friday of last week. The marches followed protests by teachers and hospitality workers earlier in the week.

Workers in the food and tourism industries took action on Tuesday of last week with the slogan, "We have paid a lot-we will not pay again.

The action linked immediate demands for protection during



the outbreak to the coming struggles over jobs and pay. They demanded protective equipment, but also pay rises and secure

And on Thursday of last week teachers demonstrated against attacks on education that will increase class sizes and make it harder for students to get into

university.

Greece's right wing New **Democracy government** has congratulated itself for the country's relatively low coronavirus death rate.

But it has used the lockdown to try and force through attacks on ordinary people without sparking mass resistance.

The government is getting ready to make ordinary people pay the price for the coming global economic crisis triggered by the virus.

Protests are vital to try and prepare the resistance against the coming onslaught.



# **Fake tears** for children

HOW DARE Tory MPs and Ofsted school inspectors claim to champion the rights of disadvantaged children during the lockdown when they have caused the disadvantage in the first place (Socialist Worker, 29 April)

We are teachers in east London and know well how those children have been affected by Tory policies.

The coronavirus crisis impacts directly on the children and families we work with—and makes our work even more challenging.

Overcrowding and poverty are reinforcing

anxiety among our pupils.
Parents rightly worry
about their children going out, but many don't have a garden for them to escape to. So they're stuck indoors, in some cases with up to ten people in a small flat.

The system to provide financial relief for parents on free school meals has been a mess and some families are struggling to feed themselves.

This crisis is going to impact the learning of the disadvantaged so much more since many don't have ready access to computers at home. Some have to share one laptop among four or more siblings.

Parents of disadvantaged children are often less confident helping with lessons schools set for home.

We must not allow the coronavirus crisis to put families under more pressure—we will not let our pupils fall behind.

We know that there is more to education than exams. We need to look at how, what and why we teach, and fight like fury to end the system that has caused inequality.

Daisy and Marion



# We made silence political

IN OXFORDSHIRE we wanted to make sure that last week's Workers' Memorial Day action to remember health and care staff was more than a silent protest.

We needed it to take up the key issues of PPE shortages and testing. In the run-up, we held our first Oxford Trade Union Covid-19

Action Group meeting. Activists from FBU, CWU, PCS,

Unite, Unison, NASUWT and NEU unions joined in and agreed a plan. At the Warneford Hospital in

Oxford over 60 health workers attended a joint-union event which included Unison, CSP, Unite, RCN and the BMA.

A nurse read out the names of health workers who have died from Covid-19 and that was followed by a minute's silence.

Union reps spoke about cuts, staff shortages, lack of preparation for the pandemic, plus the high number of BME deaths-and the role migrants play in our services.

At nearby Littlemore hospital, ten Unison members observed the minute's silence and held "PPE not promises" placards.

Firefighters across six stations conducted minute's silence parades, and postal workers also protested outside East Oxford delivery office, holding posters about testing and PPE.

DHL delivery workers, who are members of Banbury GMB No. 1 union branch, also held a minute's silence, with posters demanding PPE and testing. They distributed 500 facemasks to a local hospice and care home.

By organising collectively, and making a plan, we turned the minute's silence into a real protest.

OUR TRADES council in Brent, west London, does not have a reputation for calling action—but the terrible death toll of London

bus drivers from coronavirus spurred it into action.

A successful one minute's silence was held outside Willesden bus garage on Workers' Memorial Day last week.

Around 25 local trade unionists gathered to commemorate those from that garage who have died and many bus workers came out to

It was a tremendous show of

solidarity. Before the gathering, we persuaded the trades council to have an open Zoom meeting for trade union activists, and over 50 attended.

That's where it was agreed to call for an assembly outside the

I believe this successful protest has raised everyone's expectations and given us all a confidence

> Ashok Pursani West London

# a shift in to keep this country ticking. Public Health England's

announcement of an inquiry into the disproportionate number of Covid-19 deaths among BME people can't happen soon enough.

But Trevor Phillips' involvement isn't welcome. He said Muslims are becoming a "nation within a nation'

Black and brown departed faces looking at us have paid the ultimate price. They deserve a champion not an outrider for Islamophobia and class inequality denier.

**Harold Wilson** South London

# thought...

## Time to bury pay restraint

I AM a council cemetery worker on a salary of £19,000 a year. The Labour and trade union leaders seem to think that now is not the time to criticise the government or raise demands.

I disagree. I think now is the perfect time to demand a 20 percent pay rise for nurses and every other public sector worker who earns even less

Why not see what your neighbours think of this when you are out clapping on Thursday?

Timothy Robinson

Bradford

## System can turn vegan

IF VEGANISM is profitable, industrial capitalism will find a way to maximise profit and therefore render it ecologically unsafe and unsustainable.

No matter what the product, capitalism will find a way. Smash capitalism, not the planet!

By email

# Clampdown gets nastier

THE MINISTRY of Justice is acting unlawfully by attaching what are known as "additional licence conditions" to many released prisoners.

These aim to restrict where people can live and work, and who they can see and how they can communicate.

They have implemented a blanket policy instead of the case by case consideration that should be applied.

This was happening before the coronavirus crisis, but you can imagine how much more restrictive it is now.

Lee Morgan Wolverhampton

## Football 1 Safety 0

IT SEEMS the authorities are trying to soften us up for ending the lockdown.

Talk of restarting the football season is one way of doing that. Of course, all us fans would like to watch games during lockdown, but let's think of the cost.

Football going back would be used as an excuse for the return to "business as usual".

Leigh Camp

# A senseless slaughter

I READ in last week's Socialist Worker about how farmers are destroying milk because the "market" has dried up.

Meat firms in the US are

now slaughtering 35,000 pigs a day because they say their "supply chain has broken"

And they've shut down a lot of their processing plants too.

This highlights how cut-throat the meat industry is.

Millions of animals were killed needlessly before this crisis because of "market conditions". Now, because so many restaurants have closed, mega-farms are killing, burning and dumping even more.

This not only shows us how wasteful capitalism, but how cruel it is too.

And it's not just animals that suffer. Big meat businesses also attack unions for dissuading workers from returning to their jobs until they are safe. These firms are willing to risk their employees' lives for profit.

**Molly Docherty** 

# Phillips has no place on **BME** inquiry

JUST LOOK at the shuddering montage of workers who became Covid-19 victims

It's a grim reflection of who is carrying the stack of this disease—pregnant nurse Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, aged 28, who would never cradle the baby delivered following her death, or Areema Nasreen, 36 and mother of

three, who became a nurse after starting as a hospital housekeeper.

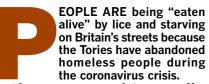
Trevor Phillips

The first four surgeons to die in Britain were Muslims from African and Asian countries. Taxi drivers, shelf-stackers, porters and cleaners—it's they who put

# HOMELESS ABANDONED BY A FAILE SYSTEM



Despite Tory promises to house homeless people, the most vulnerable are left struggling with a situation that's only getting worse. **Sadie Robinson** spoke to people living on the streets in a city under lockdown. Photographs by Guy Smallman



The government claims to offer temporary accommodation in hotels to people sleeping rough. In reality, the most vulnerable are being left to rot.

"They've shut all the services—there's nothing," Tom, who has been homeless for three years, told Socialist Worker. "Everything's gone. I haven't got a toilet so if I need to have a shit on the street

then I'm going to.
"The place where we used to get showers and get clothes washed is closed. We've all got body lice. I had an abscess on my foot where I got bit.

"They're all over everybody, you can see everybody itching. We're all getting eaten alive.'

Tom has been forced to beg in central London. But with the lockdown, there are far fewer people around to ask for

Homeless people in the capital have become more visible on the otherwise near-deserted streets. Elias, stood outside a Tesco next to the Houses of Parliament. has been homeless for seven years.

"St Mungo's shelter is full and everything else is closed," he said. "There never was anything for us but now it's even worse.

Aaron was made newly homeless when he was released from prison in April. "I wish I was back inside to be honest," he said.

## **Brutal** and broken benefits

TOM became homeless after being refused benefits. "I've worked all my life, but I got problems with my spine so I had to pack it in," he said. "At one point I was

getting £180 a month but my rent was £500.

"I went to the council for help. If you don't have your benefits, they won't house you. I needed to have medicals to prove I couldn't work to get my benefits. It took two and a half years to sort this out."

A brutal benefits system led to three vears of homelessness

And now, as the coronavirus tears through vulnerable people, authorities wash their hands of the problems.

"I've done everything right but they're not helping me," he said. "We've been left and abused, and that's that."

"It's really hard under the lockdown because no centres are open. Even churches that usually give out food are shut. I've been staying by Downing Street the last few nights and I've got

soaking wet.

"They say people will be put up in hotels, but I've not seen them put me up anywhere."

#### Arrested

Others know of some homeless people who have been offered hotels—but it's patchy to say the least. Rory, homeless near Trafalgar Square, hasn't been offered anything. "They say they're putting people in hotels—well they are and they aren't," he told Socialist Worker.

Tom said he is on a list for a hotel place after being in contact with a homelessness charity, but still hasn't been offered one.

And Mike, sat near Charing Cross station with his dog, said he hasn't "been approached by anyone about going into





"A lot of people have been put in hotels, it's true," he said. "But there are still a lot of people out here."

And life for them has got harder.

"The local Sainsbury's won't serve the homeless and lots of places are card

only," said Tom.
"We used to sleep in Charing Cross subway, now they've shut it off. They just kicked us out, arrested a couple of people."

Tom said reports that homeless people are being housed affect how people see him. "They're telling people they're helping the homeless, but they're not helping," he said.

"So people will look at me and think why is he sat there begging when they've offered him a hotel? They'll be thinking, he's a druggie or he's done something

The lack of support for homeless people has led to a surge in demand for the volunteers who try to fill the gap.

Mikkel set up Under One Sky (UOS), a collection of volunteers who provide food, drink and support to homeless people in London.

The immediate issue people had when the lockdown began was food, he told Socialist Worker. "A couple of

days in, we met a man who hadn't eaten for six days."

He said there was an "air of

desperation among homeless people' from the start. Some didn't understand what was happening.

"If you don't read the papers you wouldn't know about the virus," said Mikkel. "Suddenly the city was just shutting down."

UOS said the situation on London's streets has been "shocking". "Cut off from the marginal support network on which they rely, the homeless people we spoke to were scared and literally starving," it said. Since then, things have got worse.

The huge issue now is hygiene," said Mikkel. "There are no toilets—cafes, pubs and so on are closed. Before the lockdown, people could get showers in day centres and hostels. But all these facilities are closed.

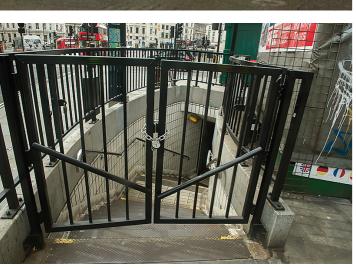
"There are people with lice. Some people have had no shower for four weeks. There are women who had their period a week ago and have no new knickers, no tampons, no showers.

"People have no change of clothing. So there is a big issue with people's





Picture panel (clockwise from top left) Sleeping rough outside the Shaw Cafe in Holborn, London—named after moderate socialist George Bernard Shaw. Mike sits with his dog near Charing Cross station. Passers-by are few and he is collecting much less money than he used to. The government claims that homeless people are being housed in hotels but thousands are still sleeping in doorways, with all toilet and washing facilities closed. Despite the virus, those on the streets still face attention from police and security guards





# 'We need to shout about this'

THE GOVERNMENT announced in late March that it would house all of London's rough sleepers. It hasn't. The Under One Sky (UOS) group of volunteers began a nightly service on 2 April to feed homeless people in the capital. In 20 days it had served more than 4,000 meals.

Founder Mikkel said, "We are feeding between 250 and 350 people every night. And our numbers have been constant over the last three

"We know of another charity that serves around 200 meals a day in the

same areas as us too."
Mikkel added, "Quite a rosy
picture has been painted about homeless people being put up in hotels.

'Some people are in hotels, but they aren't getting any food. Some people have been waiting to get a call back and haven't had one. The

council has outreach teams but

they're short staffed.
"And a lot of homeless people have problems with mobile phones-they can't charge them, they run out of credit, or they have phones stolen."

Mikkel said there was a level of ignorance in the government about the reality of life for rough sleepers. But he also said there was "unwillingness" to help.

UOS had sent an open letter to Boris Johnson and London mayor Sadiq Khan about the situation but received no feedback on the specific issues raised.

'We need people to scream and shout about this," said Mikkel. "The government talks about ending homelessness by 2025.

They claim to care about homelessness. But they don't care about the individuals who make up the homeless."

physical health but also their mental health. People are losing it a bit more day by day.

On 29 April, UOS said it had served more meals in the previous three weeks than it had in eight years. And it reported "nightly increases in the amount of people on the streets".

For all the Tories' talk of protecting workers' jobs and wages under the furlough scheme, many people have been thrown out of work. Some 1.5 million people applied for Universal Credit within six weeks of the lockdown.



The government should set up portaloos, mobile showers and places to get a meal

And as people suffer agonising waits for meagre benefits, landlords are evicting them if they can't pay their rents. "New people are forced out every day," said UOS. People with no experience of being on the streets face an appalling situation.

"In our eight-year experience, we have never witnessed a more distressing situation for London's homeless than the one unfolding right now," it said.

"Basic needs are not being met. Many people are hungry. Hygiene is deteriorating. Substance abuse is spiralling out

"Dealers are ruthlessly exploiting the situation. Central London feels tense and jittery. The empty streets are getting more violent.

Aaron was angry at the Tories' deadly inaction. "The government should have more people in the streets looking for people who need help, especially at night," he said.

"The government could be doing more," added Rory. "They should be giving out clothing packs and stuff."

And Tom was furious that he, "street bum," could see how to solve the crisis when those at the top seemingly cannot.

"It's common sense," he said. "Why not get a message around—'At six o'clock on Friday can we have all the homeless in Leicester Square please?

"They should've done this on day one. Get all the services there in one go. Register people, get them into hotels—and it's done.

"If I can come up with a system that would work, why can't they? They're supposed to be clever.'

#### Social distance

Mikkel said the immediate problems homeless people face are "extremely simple" to solve.

"Everyone's not going to get a hotel room," he said. "So the government should set up food solutions. Currently people have to stand in line to get a meal—it's hard to social distance.

"The government should set up portaloos and mobile showers. They should set up stations where people can get underwear, socks, toiletries.

"They built the Nightingale Hospital quickly, they could build other temporary facilities.

"If music festivals can set up portaloos

in a day, why can't the government? We are over a month in and it's still not

happening.
"It wouldn't cost much to do these things. It's not a cost issue—it's a choice."

Tom agreed. "It's because they don't want things that work for us," he said. "Everything in this system is shit. It's designed to fail.

"You get called a conspiracy theorist when you start criticising the government. But for me it's a big 'Fuck the system'."

Despite the horrors, Mike said some have been "deluded" by Tory propaganda. "Some people seem to think that, when this is over, they will get housed," he said.

"I don't think they will house everyone, because the hotels will want to be making money again.'

Aaron said things would always be "really hard" for homeless people. "It's a sad and lonely life," he said. "It's not living, it's just existing."

Tom added, "With the coronavirus

we've been knocked down a level. Just when you think you can't get any lower

"We're meant to be part of society too aren't we?

# STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

# INDEPENDENT WORKING

Under capitalism workers labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

#### REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade

union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

# THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

#### **INTERNATIONALISM**

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and

transgender people.
We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be

built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class. We have to prove in practice

to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.ul or phone 020 7840 5602 for more information

# Socialist Workers Party online meetings



CHELMSFORD Wed 13 May, 7pm Zoom 899-9067-0887

**DUNDEE,ABERDEEN** & PERTH Wed 13 May, 8pm Zoom 396-573-1805

HUDDERSFIELD Wed 13 May, 6.30pm Zoom 304-919-9440

LONDON: SOUTH EAST Wed 13 May, 7.30pm 530-913-6390

# SOCIALIST WORKER ONLINE MEETINGS

Weekly meetings to discuss political issues and our local activities. All welcome.

#### Coronavirus.the family and women's oppression

Wed 13 May, 7pm

# Zoom 291-634-5938 BLACK COUNTRY

Can workers run society? Wed 13 May, 8pm Zoom 352-891-2411

**BOLTON & WIGAN** Media bias and fake news in the era of coronavirus Fri 15 May, 5.30pm

604-325-1447 RRADFORD

# Turkey, imperialism

and coronavirus Thu 14 May, 7pm 868-6617-4510

# BRIGHTON & HOVE Migrants and the

Thu 14 May, 6.30pm Zoom 391-959-428

BRISTOL Coronavirus—is

Wed 13 May, 7pm

688-397-3148

CAMBRIDGE Coronavirus and the fight

for disability rights Thu 14 May, 5pm

681-800-4408 CARDIFF

Coronavirus—why are so many BAME people dying? Wed 13 May, 7pm

630-181-4857 CHESTERFIELD

Capitalism. diet and the politics of food Thu 14 May, 6.30pm Zoom 829-532-8731

#### Canitalism and the politics of food

Wed 13 May, 7.30pm 700m 587-183-5359

75 years since VE day -their war and ours

Wed 13 May, 7.30pm 737-521-8605

GLASGOW
Pandemics and lockdown pay for this crisis?

Thu 14 May, 7pm Zoom 559-617-450

KENT

Lenin at 150—why his ideas still matter

Fri 17 Apr, 7.30pm 434-630-8064

LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE Do crises bring out the best in people? Thu 14 May, 7pm

992-204-9372

1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QE PHONE 020 7637 1848 WEB bookmarksbookshop.co.uk

# The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions. Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the

Zoom app onto your phone or computer and at the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate

meeting. The password for all meetings is 967537. Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty for news of national online meetings

Trump vs Chinacoronavirus and imperialism

and other updates.

Thu 14 May, 7pm

856-912-7408 LIVERPOOL Where does racism

Wed 13 May, 7pm 493-925-5919

LONDON: HACKNEY Coronavirus, capitalism and mental health

Thu 14 May, 7.30pm 798-534-2585

LONDON: HARINGEY Coronavirus, the family and women's oppression Wed 13 May, 7.30pm

459-388-1576 LONDON: ISLINGTON Covid-19, imperialism and the global south Thu 14 May, 6.30pm

874-012-7970

LONDON: NEWHAM Eugenics.coronavirus and capitalist crisis Wed 13 May, 7pm 700m 736-446-743

Booklaunch: 'Transgender Resistance, Socialism

Trans Liberation' with Author Laura Miles Wed 13 May, 7pm Zoom 497-196-1801

LONDON:TOWER HAMLETS
Capitalism, diet and the politics of food Wed 13 May, 7.30pn

Zoom 818-391-0420 LONDON:WALTHAM FOREST How can Palestine be free?

Wed 13 May, 7,30pm Zoom 543-030-057 LONDON:WEST

Pandemics and lockdown economics—who will pay for the crisis? Thu 14 May, 7.30pm Zoom 731-479-3555

Lenin at 150 — why his ideas still matter Wed 13 May, 7pm Zoom 323-178-7151

Art in the era of pandemics

Wed 13 May, 7pm Zoom 368-595-7212 NORWICH

Fascism, the far right and pandemics

Wed 13 May, 7.30pm Zoom 906-652-5299 NOTTINGHAM & DERBY Lenin at 150—why his

ideas still matter Wed 13 May, 7pm

Zoom 354-874-4790 OXFORD

Can workers run society? Thu 14 May, 6.30pm Zoom 879-0727-8460

PORTSMOUTH
Coronavirus, the family
and women's oppression
Wed 13 May, 7.30pm Zoom

488-934-2909 SHEFFIELD Why is Britain institutionally racist? Thu 14 May, 7pm

7<sub>00</sub>m 529-174-9278

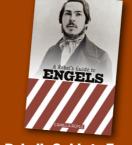
SWANSEA Coronavirus, capitalism Thu 14 May, 7.30pm

248-448-3170 YORK & SCARBOROUGH

Coronavirus—how Trump is failing the US Wed 13 May, 7pm Zoom 827-489-7492











**Hegel and Revolution** by Terry Sullivan and



**Transgender Resistance** by Laura Miles



# Unsettling film about gay repression under apartheid

Moffie tells the story of two gay conscripts in the brutal environment of the South African army. It's an interesting take on a toxic society, says Nick Clark

MOFFIE, A new film released to Curzon Home Cinema, is about two soldiers in apartheid South Africa

struggling with their sexuality.

Nicholas and Dylan are teenage conscripts drafted to fight South Africa's war on Angola in the 1980s. In a brutally repressive environment, the story focuses on the relationship the pair never quite manage to form.

From the moment Nicholas leaves for the army, he's thrust into in an aggressive, macho, but homoerotic environment. He doesn't exactly struggle—just bears it quietly for the most part. But on the inside he's drowning.

There is of course the question of making a film about a white man's suffering in a society defined by racism against black people.

It's a question director Oliver Hermanus has directly addressed.

"The subject matter did bother me at first," he said. "Why make another film about white men in apartheid South Africa?'

His answer is partly convincing. "Under this regime, boys were sort of shamed into becoming a certain kind of man.

"Because we keep asking the question, especially in South Africawhere does our toxic masculinity come from? When I looked at it that way, when I sort of saw this as an exploration of our past that informs our present, I was more comfortable

So there are nods to the racism that pervaded apartheid society. Early on, a jeering train full of white army recruits threaten, taunt and humiliate a black man waiting at a station as officers watch on approvingly

It does mean that none of the few black characters have much agency in this film. They are just silent objects who racism is done to. But maybe that's the point.

It's a suggestion that the toxic, hostile, culture in the military grows out of the racism at the heart of South African society.

Anything that challenges that is crushed. To be gay is almost as unacceptable as to be sympathetic with black Africans.

The whole set-up is meant to dehumanise the recruits, to make them killing tools of the South African regime. "You dogs are now property of the South African government," they quickly learn.

Nicholas and Dylan's relationship is stamped out before it even has a chance to begin, leading to a somewhat unsettling—but powerful-ending.

Moffie is available at



**CLANCY VISITS strange new virtual worlds** 

# A spectacular—if weird—cult cartoon

## **TELEVISION**

THE MIDNIGHT GOSPEL

Available to stream on Netflix

**PSYCHEDELIA IS back with** a 21st century twist in this animated chat show that's sure to build up a cult following. Space-podcaster Clancy and

his guests chew the fat in strange new virtual worlds, usually just as they collapse or explode.

The first episode mulls drug policy amid a zombie apocalypse.
The second stars a six-legged

deer-dog waxing philosophical about death from within a meat factory grinder on a world where alien clowns battle giant flies. The combination is intense and the strong whiff of New Age mysticism certainly wouldn't have been Marx or Lenin's cup of magic mushroom tea.

But the view is incredible, so what's the harm in sitting back and enjoying the wild ride? Just remember to come back to Earth. Dave Sewell

## DOCUMENTARY

#### THE CHANGIN' TIMES OF IKE WHITE

Coming soon to BBC4

THE CHANGIN' Times of Ike White follows the iourney of a musical prodigy and the mythical album he made while serving life for murder.

Released in 1976, Changin' Times was a commercial album recorded inside an American prison, gaining Ike White industry adulation from the likes of Stevie Wonder.

This compelling new documentary for BBC Four traces a gritty and soulful

With never-before-seen archive material, the film charts Ike's journey



from prison into industry adulation and life as a free man. His journey eventually leads to his reinvention as a performer for hire called David Maestro.

It twists and turns like the best true-crime cinema and is anything but a straightforward music biography.

#### **FILM**

#### SET IT OFF

Available on BFI Player at bit.ly/BFI-set-it-off

NEW TO the British Film Institute is 1996 film Set

Francesca "Frankie" Sutton is a Los Angeles bank teller who is fired



after a robbery. Frankie goes to work as a janitor with her three best friends.

But their new boss treats them with disrespect and

pays them paltry wages. Tired of working a lowpaying job, one of them suggests that they should rob a bank themselves.

# HISTORY & THEORY

# O mark 75 years after Nazi Germany's surrender, the British government plans a "People's Celebration" across the Bank Holiday weekend.

On Victory in Europe (VE) Day on Friday, a broadcast from the queen will be followed by a "national sing along" of Vera Lynn's We'll Meet Again.

With the "golden generation" in lockdown, the BBC says it wants to "let them know that we have not forgotten the peace that they won for us".

What the official VE Day celebrations won't admit is that our rulers and ordinary people had fought for very different visions of peace.

On 8 May 1945, a million people took to the streets of London. Tory prime minister Winston Churchill, the king, queen and royal family waved to the crowd from the balcony of Buckingham Palace.

But within a few months, Churchill was booted out of office after a landslide victory for Clement Attlee's Labour Party.

Churchill's Conservatives had urged people to "vote National" for a return to the "normal" of the 1930s.

He wanted to focus on war against "another foe who occupies large portions of the British Empire"—Japan.

And, indeed, British, French and allied troops fought on to regain control of their colonies in North Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

utlandishly, Churchill claimed Labour's plans for a welfare state "would have to fall back on some form of Gestapo"—a reference to the Nazi secret police.

But the old Tory nonsense didn't wash with millions of working class people. They didn't want to go back to the unemployment queues, overcrowded slums, hunger and poor health of the 1930s. Labour rode to office on a

Labour rode to office on a popular wave. But it had not created that wave. As one writer puts it, "Labour won because of the colossal mood for change engendered by the war."

Class differences weren't put aside during the Second World War.

There were calls for national unity and social peace from Labour and union leaders. But workers in mines, car and aviation plants, shipyards and engineering walked out over low pay and working conditions.

Attlee had asked, "Is this country in peace as in war to be governed on the principle that public welfare comes before private interest?".

His Labour government was the high point of social democratic reform in Britain



# VEDAY—DID WORKERS WIN THE PEACE?

As we mark 75 years since Victory in Europe Day, **Donny Gluckstein** looks at the class forces behind the frontline that helped to shape the post-war world



and made considerable achievements such the NHS and welfare state.

But how far did it live up to hopes of radical change and putting public welfare over private interest?

Reforms weren't just handed down from above by the Labour government or a continuation of wartime policy.

of wartime policy.

And working class struggles would be necessary to force reforms from the Labour after the war. One example was a

Within a few months Tory Churchill was booted out squatters' movement, sometimes led by the Communist Party, that erupted at the lack of council housing. On the "Great Sunday Squat"

On the "Great Sunday Squat" on 8 September 1946, more than 100 families occupied buildings across west London.

The initial plan was for occupations in Kensington.

But so many people turned up, they took over buildings across Marylebone, Pimlico, and St John's Wood.

The Labour government

responded with repression.

They arrested the squatters' Communist leaders under "conspiracy to trespass", and drafted new legislation. Cops laid siege to the buildings.

But the action forced housing up the agenda.

Some of the squatters left the plush west London buildings in defiant marches and were rehoused.

Other sites that had been squatted became part of new council housing developments.

Even at the height of social democratic reformism, its parameters are set by what capitalism is willing to concede while keeping up profits.

while keeping up profits.

Take the NHS, a great advance on private and charitable health services before the

The architect of the NHS, Labour minister Aneurin Bevan, had put pushed the idea of public welfare more strongly.

"The essence of a satisfactory health service is that the rich and poor are treated alike, that poverty is not a disability, and wealth is not advantaged," he said.

Unfortunately, Bevan said he had to "stuff their mouths with gold" to win the cooperation of GPs and consultants. They were allowed to split their time between NHS work and privately funded care.

So access to health was not equal for rich and poor.

When the Korean war began in 1951, Labour brought in charges for dentistry, spectacles and prescriptions to pay for the army.

The "cradle to grave" welfare state was another important step forward.

T BUILT on previous, more limited welfare reforms in the 1900s that sought to address the worst of disease and squalor among working class people. A healthier and more educated workforce would help Britain compete with rivals.

In 1942 the Liberal Party's William Beveridge issued a famous report on welfare.

It advocated a health service, improved education, mass council housing and benefits "from the cradle to the grave".

These relied on an economy with high employment levels.

Beveridge's ideas were enthusiastically received. People bought some 635,000 copies of his dry document. Opinion polls showed over 90 percent backing.

Labour promoted some universal benefits, however, it also followed Beveridge's lead.

When providing "a national minimum" the state "should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility".

The welfare safety net helped very poorest, but did not roll back a society based on private interest.

And it was kept as cheap as possible. Many other countries without social democratic governments were more generous.

The reforms after VE Day were the product of bosses fear of revolt and changes in capitalism.

There were Tory ministers with more foresight than Churchill who recognised what was going on.

As early as February 1943, Tory MP Quintin Hogg warned the House of Commons, "If you do not give the people social reform, they are going to give you social revolution.

Many bosses agreed, one saying, "If industry doesn't plan for revolution, there'll be revolution.

"And we can only avoid it by adopting great changes that are going to be forced on us anyway if we don't do it ourselves.

These splits at the top of society opened up possibilities for radical change.

UT IN 1945, Labour was pushing at a partially open door. Some of its proposed reforms had already been adopted during the Second World War.

A war economy meant minimising the anarchy of the free market, state planning and control of private industry.

Sections of the ruling class could see how state intervention in the economy could be beneficial to capitalism.

And some bosses could tolerate public ownership.

Wartime focus on armaments production had left coal and other infrastructure dilapidated, and bosses didn't want to foot the bill of repairs.

The state saved them the trouble, buying them out with ample compensation.

Then many former private sector managers were reinstated to run the new nationalised industries

Schooled in pursuing private interest, they continued to treat the workforce as in the past.

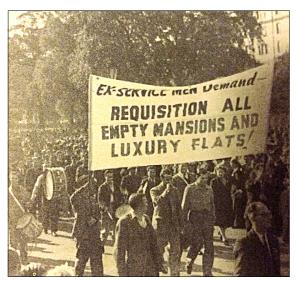
With the exception of iron and steel, Tory governments of the 1950s and 1960s left nationalisation intact.

But after 1947, British capitalism began faltering under the

weight of debt from the war. Labour accepted the need for austerity rather than go on the offensive against capital.

The government slashed food imports by £66 million and rations, meaning people had worse diets than during the war.

And they slashed overall spending eventually by £280 million—around £10 billion in today's money. The





A mass demonstration in Bloomsbury, 1946, demands housing (top).
Alongside soldiers returning from war, workers made similar demands including (above) at military plane manufacturer

government pushed through wage restrained—and, despite protest, the union leaders accepted it. When workers objected, they had troops break strikes.

There were two sides to the 1945 victory.

The defeat of Nazi Germany and the peace that followed certainly should be remembered, but we should not look at VE Day through rose-tinted glasses.

There was no victory for people in the colonies who would have to fight for their freedom.

Workers in Britain improved their position compared to the horrors of the 1930s.

But as soon as economic conditions worsened again the system clawed back many of the gains—under both Tory and Labour administrations.

The pandemic has cruelly exposed the consequences of years of austerity, low pay, and gaps in welfare.

Once again people don't want to go back to normal.

The lesson of 1945 is that it requires fights to wrest reforms from our rulers—and changing the system to stop them taking back the gains we make.

## **READ MORE**

A People's History of the Second World Warresistance versus empire by Donny Gluckstein £19.99

■The Labour Party—A Marxist History by Tony Cliff, Donny Gluckstein and

Charlie Kimber £14.99

Available at Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop. Go to bookmarks bookshop.co.uk





# Union leaders' inaction flows from drive to compromise

In a crisis that puts workers' lives at great risk, union leaders must step up the fight. Tomáš Tengely-Evans explains why most have failed to do so

MINISTERS, BOSSES and union leaders sat around a table last week and discussed how to get people fearful of coronavirus back to work. It's a damning indictment of unions at a time when they should be fighting against business putting profit before lives.

Despite the crisis, approval in the government still remains relatively high.

Calls by unions to present some opposition to the Tories and their calls to get everyone back to work could make a difference to this.

But instead of calling for action, unions are propping up the government. Why is that?
Trade unions are

organisations to defend working class people within capitalism. Faced with the power of bosses in the workplace, individuals can't win by kicking back themselves. But organising collectively gives our class strength—whether it's fighting for higher pay, health and safety or standing up to a bullying manager.

That's why some unions have seen an increase in membership during the coronavirus crisis. Unison, which represents workers in health and local government, has seen 16,000 people join this year, mostly in March and early April.

Unions have won important gains for working class people.

But unions have a bureaucracy—the fulltime officials who face almost no accountability. Understanding the social position of the bureaucracy is key to understanding its conservatism.

The union bureaucracy is removed from the workers it represents and officials are neither bosses nor workers.

In Marxism and Trade Union Struggle, socialists

# **UNITE LEADER Len McCluskey outside Downing Street**

Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein explained that the bureaucracy "is a distinct, basically conservative, social formation"

They described union bureaucrats as "managers of discontent".

Their job is to negotiate between capital and labour and reach a settlement in disputes.

This means officials sometimes want to control workers' action, and often see it as a threat to negotiations with bosses.

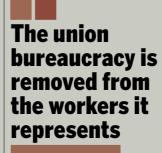
#### Invited

At the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, some union officials tried to stop activists from making public calls for PPE or testing. They had been invited to sit at the top table with ministers and bosses, and saw demands as a threat

to "social partnership".

The union bureaucracy's aim isn't to end capitalist exploitation, but to improve the terms of exploitation within the system.

Officials often accept the false idea of national interest between bosses and workers. And, as they balance



between bosses and workers, at "all decisive moments" the bureaucracy sides with the status quo.

Cliff and Gluckstein acknowledged that "of course the bureaucracy is not homogeneous".

"Union officials in different industries find themselves under varying pressures from below and above," they wrote.

You can see those differences now. Some manufacturing bosses are threatening workers with the sack unless they return to work. That same pressure doesn't exist in schools, for instance.

And the division between right and left wing officials matters.

But whatever the differences, all bureaucrats are subject to the same pressures as a result of

their social position.
This means that they remain removed the everyday realities faced by from workers.

Socialists should be strongly for joining and building unions—and sometimes leaders call action.

If all the bureaucracy did was compromise with the bosses, they wouldn't retain any members.

So even right wing union bureaucracies can lead fights.

There are battles coming over a return to

work and who pays for the post-virus slump.

Activists have to reject appeals for national unity, organise what action they can now and build workers' confidence to fight.

# INTERNATIONAL

# US housing campaigns could launch rent strikes

by GLYN ROBBINS

COVID-19 HAS laid bare the US's massive housing crisis—but it's also highlighted inspiring grassroots campaigns.

Around the country, tenants are refusing to accept losing their homes, while landlords continue to receive corporate welfare.

In Los Angeles, protests are regularly held outside the mayor's house, demanding he protect tenants from rent rises and evictions.

Following the "Moms for Housing" movement in Oakland, homeless families in other parts of California are occupying empty homes.

#### Rolling

In Missouri, campaigners staged a rolling protest along two hundred miles of highway, from Kansas City to St Louis.

In New York state, a powerful alliance of over 70 local groups is putting huge pressure on politicians to cancel rent until the crisis is over.

One of them, Community Action for Safe Apartments

Phone

A CAMPAIGNER in Los Angeles in April—campaigns are springing up across the US

(Casa) in the Bronx, held an online Town Hall meeting on Tuesday of last week.

Casa works with some of New York City's poorest people, most of them Hispanic or African-American.

Thousands have lost their jobs since March. Others have put their lives at risk by

continuing to work in essential services, fearing they'll lose their homes otherwise.

The rate of coronavirus deaths in the Bronx is double that for the rest of the city.

One of Casa's tenant leaders, Anita Long, said, "The impact has disproportionately affected our community.

"This is not accidental. The Bronx has suffered from decades of disinvestment and racist government policy." But she added, "Together,

But she added, "Together, we vastly outnumber the landlords."

This spirit is motivating increasing calls for a rent strike if New York State politicians don't take action to keep people in their homes.

Casa estimates 40 percent of Bronx tenants can't afford the next rent payment. So the possibility of a rent strike is about necessity, not slogans.

Campaigners argue that, if thousands of tenants can't pay the rent, it's better to do that together and increase pressure for rent cancellation.

Otherwise, they fear there'll be an explosion of homelessness in June, when the current moratorium on evictions ends.

#### **Differences**

There are some important differences between the housing situation in the US and Britain and how campaigners respond to it, particularly now.

The US private rented sector is bigger and controlled by corporate landlords who dominate in some places.

Public housing is very difficult to obtain.

But campaigners are confident because they've had recent successes.

This has brought political support from politicians such

as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who place housing at the centre of their platforms.

Within a broader resurgence of the left and grassroots trade union militancy in the US, there's a growing chorus for more investment in public housing.

There are lessons to learn for campaigners in Britain, above all, the need for broadbased, united, tenant-led campaign coalitions.

Housing rights will be at the forefront of whether "returning to normal" means more of the same, or something better.

Coronavirus has proved, once again, that the homes and lives of working class people are held cheap by capitalism.

But as New York City Assembly member Michael Blake put it to a Casa Town Hall meeting, "I'm not dying so this country's economy can get better. My ancestors already did that."

The Homes for All coalition is holding an online public meeting at 7pm, Saturday 9 May. Go to @Homes4AllUK on Twitter or Axe the Housing Act on Facebook for details

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6 May 2020

# BACKGROUND CHECK

# Virus in prison system puts inmates lives at risk

by **SOPHIE SQUIRE** 

CORONAVIRUS is ripping through prisons, as cruel conditions put tens of thousands of people

Around 2,000 prisoners across Britain may have been infected with Covid-19, says Public Health England.

The latest threat comes across a backdrop of violence, abuse and neglect.

And Office of National Statistics data from last week show at least 15 people have died from the virus.

Prisoners are caged in their cells for 23 hours a day—a measure that the Ministry of Justice says could last until April 2021.

It said that full prison lockdown, including an end to social visits, education and workshops, could be in place for another year.

They're in danger because in dangerously overcrowded prisons inmates are denied proper healthcare and are cramped in tiny cells making social distancing impossible.

The government is even erecting 500 converted shipping containers for prisoners.

The confined spaces of prisons means that Covid-19 can spread rapidly-much the same way it did on

Inmates are already subject to violence and neglect—and treated like punching bags by prison officers.

A report from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) found that officers

were punching inmates in a practice known as "preventative strikes

The prison staff claimed to do this to people they suspect "might misbehave in the future".

The CPT, which observed these 'preventative strikes" in all three prisons it inspected, called it a "reprehensible practice and "deeply concerning"

And another report by the Inquest charity said that healthcare in prisons was inadequate.

"The standard of care is not in line with the standard provision in the

"Staff shortages, and a reliance on bank or agency staff who may lack relevant training, is a common problem," it said.

Prisoners often find that concerns about their health are ignored or disbelieved by prison officers.

And deaths in prison are often classed as "natural deaths" but are preventable. If prisoners had received the proper care that they needed and quickly then health problems could be treated.

Another factor putting prisoners at a heightened risk of is the high rate of pre-existing health complaints among

## **Death sentence**

ANDREA Bear Circle, an indigenous woman jailed in a Texas federal prison, died from coronavirus on 28 April.

She was pregnant when handed a twoyear sentence for a drugs related charge in January.

Her baby was delivered on 1 April by caesarean section while Andrea was hospitalised and on a ventilator.

"Andrea should have never been in jail in the first place," said Democratic congresswoman Ayanna

She said that Andrea was one of the thousands of people "trapped inside prison systems because of systemic inequities and a failed war on drugs.'

## Torture report

THE COUNCIL of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture visited HMP Doncaster, HMP Liverpool and HMP Wormwood Scrubs last

Its recently-published report finds that all three prisons are failing to adequately manage prisoners at risk of serious self-harm or suicide. It recommends "concrete steps to significantly reduce the prison population".

# Prisoners' riots demand a 'right to life'

Prisoners protest in Peru

DESPERATE PRISONERS across the globe are taking action to demand better conditions that minimise their risk of infections. Prison riots and protests have erupted in several countries since the pandemic started its deadly grip.

People in the La Modelo prison in Bogota, Columbia rioted in March due to lack of healthcare and other basic rights.

"They have us abandoned us like dogs," said one prisoner in a video posted to social media.

At least 23 prisoners died during the violence, and nine guards were

In Peru last week nine people died during a prison riot, in an institution that is at more than double its capacity.

Inmates at the Miguel Castro prison in Lima protested at the lack of sanitation and health care.

Prisoners climbed on to the roof in an attempt to escape and unfurled

It read, "We want Covid-19 tests, we have the right to life"

# Left to die

PRISONERS are currently being held in their cells for 23 hours a day in order to try to contain the virus.

But why is the government forcing them to stay in dangerous conditions rather than letting them self isolate at home?

The Ministry of Justice originally claimed that 4,000 inmates could be allowed out of prison to relieve pressure on overcrowded jails.

But as of Tuesday last week, only 33 people had been released.

Britain is lagging behind other countries, who have released prisoners close to their due date, or low-risk offenders.

It's right that some prisoners should be released—and not only during a pandemic. Millions of prisoners across the globe are living in unsanitary, dangerous and inhumane conditions. The prison system doesn't rehabilitate people and doesn't stop crimesocialists should argue that they are not the answer.

# **Self harm is** on the rise

SELF-harming in prison has skyrocketed in the past year—rising by around 14 percent in England and Wales.

A report by the Ministry of Justice found that self harming incidents were recorded at an average rate of one every eight minutes. Frances Crook from

the Howard League for Penal Reform said the figures "reveal the sheer scale of human misery behind bars across England and Wales.

"The figures show that keeping prisoners safe during the pandemic involves so much more than seeking to reduce rates of infection."

# Supreme Court victory for the Palestine solidarity campaign

By NICK CLARK

THE PALESTINE Solidarity Campaign (PSC) is celebrating a victory against Tory attempts to clamp down on boycotts of Israel, after a court ruling last week.

The Supreme Court ruled that the government's guidance to councils against divesting from foreign countries and the defence industry was unlawful.

It means councils are free to withdraw investments from Israeli industries, in solidarity with Palestinians-a demand of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

The ruling is a blow against attempts to outlaw and discredit BDS and solidarity with the Palestinians.

PSC chair Kamel Hawwash said, "This historic victory represents a major win not just for the campaign for Palestinian rights, but for the fundamental principles of democracy, freedom of expression and justice.

"The supreme court ruling sends a decisive message to the government that they should not be dictating how local government pension schemes choose to invest their funds.

"This includes choosing not to invest in companies complicit in Israel's human rights abuses.

The Supreme Court decision is a setback for Tory attempts to stop councils withdrawing pension fund investments from Israeli industries.

The government issued guidance in 2016 that prohibited councils

## **BACK STORY**

#### Tory attempts to silence Palestine solidarity have suffered a blow

- They wanted to undermine the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign in solidarity with Palestinians
- The Supreme Court ruled that government guidance to councils about divesting from foreign countries and the defence industry was unlawful
- The ruling means local authorities can divest from Israeli

from divesting in companies that trade in Israeli products produced in occupied Palestinian land.

The PSC won a judicial review in 2017 to say that this prohibition was unlawful, but the Court of Appeal overturned this in 2018. But now the Supreme Court has ruled in the PSC's favour.

#### **Divesting**

It comes months after Johnson announced plans to introduce a new law that would ban councils from divesting from foreign countries—specifically citing the BDS campaign.

Supporters of Israel hope to tarnish BDS and PSC with accu-sations of antisemitism, accusing them of singling out Israel because

In fact, the boycott campaign is a response to a call for solidarity from Palestinian civil society organisations. It's a tactic that aims



**MARCHING FOR Palestinian rights** 

to expose the brutality of Israel's occupation of Palestine. And as Israel moves to annexe even more Palestinian land, it's vital to defend the right to campaign against it. Hawwash said, "At a time when

Israel is continuing to ramp up its oppression of the Palestinian people and its illegal acts, including annexing large swathes of the illegally occupied West Bank, the government should be acting

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

to uphold international law and defend human rights, not attacking peaceful campaigns which seek to do precisely that.
"PSC will continue to resist any

attempts to suppress BDS activism."

## **OBITUARIES**

# **Pete Gillard**

1949-2020

PETE GILLARD, who died recently, was a longtime Socialist Workers Party (SWP) member, Unite union activist and NHS campaigner.

He joined the International Socialists, the forerunner of the SWP, in 1969 while a student in Durham.

Almost from the beginning, Pete impressed people in the party with his knowledge of Marxism and how he tried to engage others and not show off his abilities.

Pete moved to London and began working in the fledgling computer industry, a career that he would remain in almost throughout his life. He took part in building the IS/SWP and in key battles, such as the Grunwick strike and the

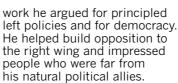
fight against the fascist National Front.

In the early 1980s he moved to the US, where he was active and influential in the Pete Gillard International

Socialist Organisation, and then to the Netherlands. There he was important in developing the new revolutionary Internationale Socialist group.

Back in Britain in the late 1990s, Pete was an outstanding union activist in the MSF. Amicus and then Unite unions. He was inventive, good at working out ways to assemble alliances against the bureaucrats, and always capable of seeing the bigger political picture.
Pete was elected to the

union's standing orders committee and became its chair. Throughout his union



Pete also became involved in battles in the NHS, an area of work that accelerated after he retired and moved to Shropshire In 2013 Pete had left the SWP

and joined the RS21 group. Even those who disagreed with him have the highest respect for Pete's work and know that the socialist movement will

miss him greatly. Condolences

to his partner Gill and all those who knew and loved him. **Stevie Darlington** 1957-2020

OUR FRIEND and comrade Stevie Darlington died last month after a long period of

ill-health. Throughout his working life. Stevie was a principled trade unionist, a socialist and committed anti-racist.

Born in Coatbridge, Lanarkshire, he left school in 1975 to work as

an electrician's labourer. He moved to London in 1985 to work for the Inland Revenue. That year he joined the Socialist Workers Party and became a union activist in the forerunner of the PCS union.

Stevie moved to Hamilton in 1990 with his then partner Kim. Working in the main Scottish Tax Centre at East Kilbride. he sold Socialist Worker and was a workplace union rep.

He fought to build a fighting union in opposition to the relentless onslaught on jobs



a regular at local branch meetings and activities. In recent years, despite his poor health, he was always

among the first to sign up for the annual Marxism festivals in London and in Glasgow. To the end Stevie loved his

politics, and though his activity was restricted he remained an avid reader. His enthusiasm in adversity, his warmth and generosity, made him an inspiration to all who knew and worked alongside him.

Because of coronavirus his funeral is restricted.

But we will celebrate Stevie's life by playing a video of the great socialist folksinger, Alistair Hulett, singing the Internationale.
Our thoughts are with Stevie's sons James and Adam and all his family and friends. Dave Sherry

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# Councils in crisis as Tories won't pay up

by SARAH BATES

VITAL PUBLIC services are threatened as the Tory government fails to cough up the cash for local government.

Costs of providing services during the pandemic have meant the 343 English coun-cils stand to be £5 billion short of balancing the books this financial year.

The cost of crisis services. including providing protective equipment, financing social care and housing rough sleepers, is worsening the effect of austerity on local authorities.

The Tories have given local government £3.2 billion in crisis bailouts—but this isn't

#### **Bankrupt**

Councils could be forced to declare themselves bankrupt via what are known as Section 144 notices.

This means that they could be released from the obligation to provide any council services, excluding life-and-limb cover.

A study by industry body the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (Sigoma) looked at the LOW-PAID LOCAL council workers are doing ever more crucial work during the crisis

It found that a group of just 47 of the authorities faced extra spending of £720 million over a year.

Stephen Houghton, Sigoma chair and leader of Barnsley council said, "Services may be running now but we will see the effect will come through in six or 12 months' time. You get to

pressure faced by local a point where the frequency of waste collection is cut and the time taken to assess vulnerable peoples needs takes longer and so on.

In Scotland, councils are calling on their government to hand over funding from Westminster.

The British government Scottish councils £310 million to help pay for services during the pandemic. But the Scottish government hasn't handed it over to local authorities yet, and trade unions are calling for the funding immediately.

Johanna Baxter, head of local government at Scottish Unison, said "The scale of the crises that local authorities are having to deal with—and the impact on their resources—should be abundantly clear."

Safety? Don't

mention that

#### **DIAL-A-RIDE**

# Halt service after death

THE UNITE union, which represents 330 members employed on Transport for London's Dial-a-Ride service, is calling for the service to

be temporarily suspended. This follows the death of Dial-a-Ride driver and Unite member, Patrick David. He had worked for Dial-a-Ride for over 17 years.

The service is specifically for elderly and disabled residents in London who have mobility issues and who could not otherwise use public transport. Passengers are collected directly from their homes.

As drivers help passengers onto vehicles and then fasten them in, it is impossible for social distancing to be achieved at all times.

Unite wants the service paused until greater safety measures are fully implemented.

THE GMB union has criticised Vivid Housing for threatening workers with disciplinary action after they raised concerns about social distancing

Trades people working for Vivid—a housing association covering Portsmouth, Eastleigh, Aldershot and Basingstoke—were told to carry on working despite an industry regulatory body saying their work could be put on hold.

Workers say management won't reply to their concerns via email. This has led to several employees exercising their right to withdraw themselves from what they consider to be dangerous working conditions

Some have now been threatened with disciplinary proceedings. The union-and the wider movement-must back them all the way

# 'Why did Scotland follow Johnson?' asks new report

by **BOB FOTHERINGHAM** 

NICOLA STURGEON and the Scottish National Party Scottish government have largely avoided criticism during the coronavirus crisis.

A recent report paints a much more critical picture. It says, "Perhaps the most

surprising aspect of the British Covid crisis is that the Scottish Government has allowed its strategy and the operations to be directed by Westminster."

One of the authors is Louisa Harding-Edgar, a GP working in Glasgow and an academic fellow at Glasgow University. She spoke to Socialist Worker.

"It is odd that Scotland had stopped contact tracing early on. It is the contact tracing that is the really important thing," she said.
"The Scottish government

seemed to be following in the Westminster government's footsteps by ending contact tracing. We have a similar reduction in resources for public health in both Scotland and England in the last few years".

The report is clear—"The lack of capacity is down to budget cuts and structural changes that removed and fragmented local public services for communicable disease control in England".

It is also dictated by "The extent to which Scotland, having also centralised its functions under Health **Protection Scotland (HPS)** had also reduced its capacity for local monitoring of communicable disease control and contact tracing".

"Lack of local resources is huge. We need hundreds of thousands of people across Britain if we want to do contact tracing," said Louisa.

**Public Health England has** fewer than 300 staff based

343 local authorities across Britain. They did not have the capacity to carry out contact tracing and that is why it was stopped. It is the same in Scotland.

Public health in Scotland was centralised rather than having people in the

community"
In Scotland at the moment around 50 percent of deaths are taking place in care homes.

Louisa said, "This is just devastating. If we had a better social care system, we could have really focussed on this group in care homes.

## **Elderly**

'We knew that this virus was going to affect the elderly. Our response should have been to protect those in care homes.

"That would have meant an increase in staffing levels by two or three times and possibly move people between care homes to minimise contacts between cases and non-cases. We haven't been able to do this because 60 percent of our care homes are privately run.

"This pandemic has highlighted the failure in the current system and the need for a rethink.

"Organisations who run the care homes for money are a large part of the

"Private care homes have a lower quality or a higher risk of lower quality care and one of the big problems is the way that the staffing is handled. They have more staff vacancies and pay tends to be less".

"We have let the carers down.

With regard to easing the lockdown, Louisa believes, "Our response should have been determined locally and that should extend to how we pull out. How we get out of the lockdown should be a public health issue rather than a political decision.' ●Full report at bit.ly/C19report

## **TELECOMS**

# Fury over holiday attacks

THE CWU union has expressed its anger and dismay at telecommunications firm Openreach's decision to announce unagreed changes to its approach to annual

Openreach, a division of BT, maintains telephone cables, ducts, cabinets and exchanges.

The union says leave changes were announced in "a heavy handed communique to staff who are working flat out to keep the country's vital communication infrastructure up and running'

It adds, "Not only was the missive condescending

and authoritarian in its tone, but no attempt had been made to consult with the union on the practicality and reasonableness of new demands as to how and when annual leave should be taken at a time of coronavirus

CWU national officer for Openreach, Davie Bowman, told union members, "The company continually tells you what an exceptional job you are doing-and that the roles

you carry out are 'key'.
"So why would the same company not work with the CWU and yourselves to look at annual leave and how that is managed?'

# **AIRLINES**

# Don't delay the fightback

**AIRLINE BOSSES** are making mass job cuts and forcing through pay cuts. It's a major challenge to

unions—and to fight it they must break from notions of social partnership and

instead start fighting.
The stakes are very high.
British Airways last week announced that it wants 12,000 job cuts.

Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey said, "This devastating announcement comes on the day that BA staff joined together to lay to rest one of their own, a long-standing and much loved cabin crew member who tragically died from coronavirus

This was contracted while carrying out his duties bringing home loved ones from overseas to reunite concerned families.

"This announcement will be felt as a stab in the back. With the majority of BA's

workers on furlough, we would have expected BA's boss Alex Cruz to work with both us and the government to honour the spirit of the government's job retention scheme.

"Creating unemployment is a conscious choice by an

employer."

"Workers do not deserve to be treated as a commodity to be disposed of in this way." Meanwhile Ryanair is

planning to make 3,000 of its workers in Europe redundant and is also

planning pay cuts.
Unite national officer for aviation Oliver Richardson said, "This is another premature announcement.
"Ryanair has significant

cash reserves and is in a better place than many airlines to cope. "The union will argue that this announcement should be reversed."

# Socialist Worker



6 May 2020

# OPLE 'SWEPT DESTITUTION'

by **SADIE ROBINSON** 

**HUGE NUMBERS** of people are being driven to food banks as the coronavirus crisis deepens.

The Trussell Trust charity said it handed out 81 percent more emergency food parcels in the last two weeks of March, compared to this time last year.

And it said low wages and benefits were the main reason for the rise.

The Independent Food Aid Network (Ifan) also said it had seen record levels of demand, with an average 59 percent increase from February to March. This is 17 times higher than this time last year.

#### Coalition

A coalition of charities is now demanding the government does more to stop people from being "swept into destitution".

The charities include the Trussell Trust, Child Poverty Action Group, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Ifan.

Their demands follow weeks of warnings about MONEY HAS run out for millions of people

job cuts not having enough to eat. Emily Fay from the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance warned in early April about the growing pressure on food banks.

was "food supply. They are concerned that food donations will drop," she said.

"It's happening at the same time as we expect much higher demand."

vulnerable people who She said the biggest In Ramsgate, in Kent, food may have suffered pay or concern among volunteers bank use has gone up fourfold

during the crisis. Some food banks are running low on vol-

unteers and supplies.
In nearby Margate, food bank coordinator John Finnegan has been forced to launch a fundraiser to try and replace stocks. His service has

PICTURE: CHILD POVERY ACTION GROUPT

run since 1986. "Never in that 34 years has it seen anything like what we are facing now, he said.

"Back in January we were giving out 50-60 food parcels per week. Four months later we are doing that per day."

David O'Connor from Thanet Food Link is also fundraising to try and keep the service going. "We are running very low on supplies as the need has increased so much," he

"The charity has given out the same amount of parcels in one week as in the whole month of February.'

At the same time as at least tens of thousands more people face food insecurity in Britain, food is being destroyed on an industrial scale.

Producers are destroying eggs, pouring away milk and letting vegetables rot in the ground because the lockdowns make it harder to profit from them.

The coronavirus crisis has exposed the brutal irrationality at the heart of the system.

The charities called on the government to set up a coronavirus emergency income support scheme. Emma Revie from the Trussell Trust said the economic crisis was like a "tidal wave" but "we don't all have lifeboats".

People will continue to go hungry unless enormous pressure is put on those at

# How the benefits system abused Errol Graham

ERROL GRAHAM, who died of starvation when his benefits were cut off, had become so mentally distressed that his family believe he pulled out two of his own teeth with pliers.

Fresh details of Graham's decline, and the traumatic impact on his relatives of his lonely death and subsequent inquest, are revealed in a witness statement.

It was filed as part of the latest phase of a legal action taken by the family against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Alison Turner, the partner of Graham's son said, "The harrowing things I saw when

I visited Errol's flat following his death will always be with me. "It was clear he was

in extreme mental distress and anguish. "It is impossible

to see how a policy

could be lawful which allows benefits to be withdrawn for people in these circumstances.

**Graham weighed** just 28 kg when he was found dead at home by bailiffs sent to evict



him in June 2018, eight months after all his benefits were stopped.

This was because of his failure to attend a fitness for work assessment.

His flat had no gas, electricity supply or working phone—just one light bulb, a broken fridge and no food.

Graham's family is seeking a judicial review of the DWP's safeguarding process system.
They say he would be

alive today if officials had checked properly on his health and wellbeing before automatically revoking his benefits for failing to attend a medical assessment, leaving him without income

# One in five go hungry as coronavirus poverty bites

**ALMOST A fifth of British** households with children have been going hungry over the past five weeks.

A Food Foundation survey found that with people losing their jobs and income due to the pandemic, affected households were seeing children having to skip meals.

Some 30 percent of lone parents and 46 percent of parents with a disabled child are

facing food insecurity.
And 17 percent of parents in NHS worker families have had smaller meals than usual or have had to skip meals. Almost one in ten have not eaten for a whole day.

Anna Taylor, executive director of the Food Foundation, said, "Having access to a nutritious diet is a basic human right. Struggling families need money in

their pockets now."

The charity repeated its calls for the government to abolish immediately the five-week wait for Universal Credit, make fortnightly payments of child benefit and remove the benefit cap.